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ABSTRACT

By teaching young people how to manage conflict, conflict resolution education can reduce juvenile violence in juvenile facilities, schools, and communities, while providing lifelong decision-making skills. Conflict resolution programs also combat chronic truancy and reduce the number of suspensions and disciplinary referrals. Their potential for use in urban schools and youth programs is obvious. Conflict resolution programs are most effective when they involve the entire facility or school community, are integrated into institutional management practices and the educational curriculum, and are linked to family and community mediation initiatives. There are four general approaches to conflict resolution education: (1) process curriculum, in which conflict resolution is taught as a distinct lesson or course; (2) peer mediation, in which trained youth mediators work with peers to find solutions; (3) peaceable classroom and peaceable school methodologies that involve the whole educational environment; and (4) conflict resolution programs in nonschool settings, such as youth clubs or community centers. Community centers, usually found in urban areas, often collaborate with law enforcement agencies and other youth-serving agencies to present integrated programs. (SLD)

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Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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Conflict Resolution

by Donni LeBoeuf and Robin V. Delany-Shabazz

Delinquency and violence are symptoms of a juvenile's inability to handle conflict constructively. By teaching young people how to manage conflict, conflict resolution education can reduce juvenile violence in juvenile facilities, schools, and communities, while providing lifelong decisionmaking skills. These programs also combat chronic truancy and reduce the number of suspensions and disciplinary referrals. Reducing staff time spent on discipline and enhancing the self-esteem of participants are additional benefits.

Conflict resolution education teaches the skills needed to engage in creative problem solving. Parties to disputes learn to identify their interests, express their views, and seek mutually acceptable solutions. These programs are most effective when they involve the entire facility or school community, are integrated into institutional management practices and the educational curriculum, and are linked to family and community mediation initiatives.

Conflict Resolution Education

There are four general approaches to conflict resolution education: process curriculum, peer mediation, peaceable classroom, and peaceable school. Programs often combine elements from these approaches.

Process Curriculum

Educators who teach the principles and processes of conflict resolution as a distinct lesson or course are using the process curriculum approach. The *Program for Young Negotiators*, based on the Harvard Negotiation Project, typifies this approach. Young people, staff, and administrators are taught to practice principled negotiation as a means of goal achievement and dispute resolution. Preliminary results indicate that participating youth are successful in discussing disputes and avoiding fights with their peers. Parents and teachers reported less need to intervene in conflicts and improvement in students' ability to communicate.

In a North Carolina middle school with more than 700 students, Peace Foundation's *Fighting Fair*, a process curriculum, was initiated in combination with components from other conflict resolution programs. Within a single school year, inschool suspensions decreased 42 percent and out-of-school suspensions decreased 97 percent.

Peer Mediation

Recognizing the importance of directly involving youth, many schools and communities employ peer mediation as part of a comprehensive strategy of violence prevention. Trained youth mediators work with their peers to find resolutions to conflicts.

In Las Vegas, Nevada, the Clark County School Board and Clark County Social Services provide a comprehensive school-based mediation program for some 2,500 students at 1 middle and 3 elementary schools. An evaluation of the 1995 program found the following:

- Peer mediators successfully resolved 86 percent of the conflicts they mediated.
- There were fewer conflicts and physical fights on school grounds.
- Mediators' mediation skills and self-esteem increased.
- Effective mediators focused disputants on the specific problems requiring mediation.

Peaceable Classroom and Peaceable School

Peaceable classroom is a whole-classroom methodology that includes teaching students the foundation abilities, principles, and one or more of the three problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution education is incorporated into the core subjects of the curriculum and into classroom management strategies.

Peaceable school programs build on the peaceable classroom by integrating conflict resolution into the management of the institution with every member—from crossing guard to classroom teacher—learning and using conflict resolution. Peaceable school

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climates challenge youth and adults to believe and act on the understanding that a diverse, nonviolent society is a realistic goal.

Evaluations of *Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers*, a peaceable classroom program, and *Creating the Peaceable School* and *Resolving Conflict Creatively*, peaceable school programs, showed significant benefits to participants, declines in conflicts, and increases in positive behavior by students.

Most conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, an estimated 7,500 to 10,000, have been implemented in our Nation's elementary, middle, and high schools. However, conflict resolution programs are also a meaningful component of safe and violence-free juvenile justice facilities, alternative education programs, and community mobilization efforts to combat violence.

Conflict Resolution Programs in Nonschool Settings

The New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution's *Youth Corrections Mediation Program* teaches youth and staff communication skills and combines the conflict resolution curriculum with a mediation component. In the program's reintegration stage, families negotiate agreements for daily living before their children return home. A program evaluation reports a 37-percent decrease in disciplinary infractions among youth mediators compared with 12 percent for youth not trained as mediators. The study also found that the recidivism rate among youth trained as mediators was 18 percent lower during the first 6 months after returning to the community than for a control group not trained in mediation.

Community mediation centers are found in more than 600 communities. Typically based in nonprofit community-based agencies, the centers use trained community volunteers to provide mediation services to youth and adults in such conflicts as those involving gangs, graffiti, loitering, school suspensions, truancy, and parent/child relationships. Community mediation centers have collaborated with law enforcement, schools, and other youth-serving agencies in developing and implementing community-based comprehensive violence prevention and intervention programs.

For Further Information

Working with the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has developed a guide to help school, juvenile justice, and other youth-serving professionals and policymakers plan and implement conflict resolution education programs. For a copy of *Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings* (NCJ 160935), call the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC) at 800–638–8736. The *Guide* is also available online via the OJJDP World Wide Web page at http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm. A videotape of the OJJDP satellite teleconference *Conflict Resolution for Youth: Programming for Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings* (NCJ 161416) is available from JJC for $17, shipped to a U.S. address.

For information on training and technical assistance to implement conflict resolution education programs, contact the Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution, 110 West Main Street, Urbana, IL 61801, or call them at 217–384–4118.

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